

Cocina Peruana Para El Mundo: Gastrodiplomacy, the Culinary Nation Brand, and the Context of National Cuisine in Peru

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Abstract

Gastrodiplomacy, or the use of food in the construction of a nation brand, is one of many tools that a government can employ in its broader strategy of cultural diplomacy. The idea of pleasing the global palate while at the same time improving a country's image lies at the core of any culinary diplomacy initiative, and the case of Peru is no exception. By utilizing the promotional campaign "*Cocina peruana para el mundo*" ("Peruvian Cuisine for the World"), the Peruvian government is attempting to construct a national brand centered on its cuisine. This paper investigates the specific context of the Peruvian project while also exploring the broader motivations for and meanings of using food as a basis for a diplomacy initiative. It concludes with an attempt to deconstruct the theoretical significance and practical implications of the intersections food, identity, and nation.

Keywords

culinary diplomacy, nation brand, Peruvian Culture, nationalism, food

Introduction

Imagine for a moment a banquet table, plates replete with *cebiche*, *pachamanca*, and *ají de gallina* and glasses filled to the brim with *pisco*. Within the materiality of this food, the nation of Peru symbolically exists in all of its delectable glory. Through a public diplomacy initiative, best referred to as "gastrodiplomacy," the Peruvian government is attempting to utilize national cuisine as the foundation for the creation of a nation brand—a brand that promotes its culinary culture as being both world-class and distinctly Peruvian. With the hope of having its cuisine deemed part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the government is carrying out various promotional campaigns within and outside of Peru, such as "*Cocina peruana para el mundo*"¹ ("Peruvian Cuisine for the World").

¹ While a campaign such as this clearly has significant and varied economic consequences for a country and its people, this paper will concentrate its analysis on the idea of identity and its role in the process of building and branding a nation around cuisine.

This paper explores the Peruvian national campaign “*Cocina peruana para el mundo*” by focusing on its role in the construction of a culinary nation brand and on broader questions of national promotion on the global stage. For example, what is implied with the term “brand,” especially in the context of national cuisine? How does Peru’s gastrodiploacy initiative fit with its national image? In what ways does the Peruvian campaign foment nationalism? Through an investigation of these and related issues, the theoretical and practical implications of the intersections of food, identity, and nation begin to emerge.

The Nation as a Brand

In the world of public diplomacy, it is common practice for nations to establish a “brand” in order to better promote themselves to the world. Just as companies or businesses attempt to utilize a word or a slogan to characterize the essence of their product, a nation or a state often creates a specific representation—through words and visual images or simply through ideas and concepts—that it will portray to other nations, and as a result of this representation it aims to achieve name recognition and global respect. National governments often invest substantial funds into branding campaigns with the hope that it will translate to perceptible benefits for their nations, such as a stronger economy through increases in trade and investment, greater political capital for leverage in negotiations, or a boost in revenue gained from tourism.

Simon Anholt, an independent policy advisor in the field of public diplomacy, who is commonly considered the father of nation branding, describes the process of creating a brand as “a strategic, policy-making approach, designed to help places build on the strengths that will earn them a better reputation.”² In other words, the idea behind a nation brand involves more than simply the recognition of a unique aspect of a nation’s culture or society, although this distinctive quality certainly can be—and indeed often is—utilized for the formation of a nation brand. Rather, nation branding in its contemporary context implies a concerted effort on the part of a government to effectively utilize and/or enhance a specific feature of the nation in order to improve its image abroad.

So, how does a country demonstrate its identity? Or more specifically, what are some characteristics or features that nations commonly utilize when establishing a nation brand? For purposes of tourism, countries will often design a national brand that makes use of their natural beauty and appealing geographical features. For example, Jamaica’s tourism campaign highlights its romantic, pristine beaches and its lively, vibrant atmosphere. On the other hand, Australia, though popularly known for its tourist appeal and unique landscape, attempts to brand itself in a way that attracts investment; the government promotes what it considers its greatest asset—its diverse, successful, and optimistic people—through the brand “Australia Unlimited.”³ Alternatively, Germany launched the “Land of Ideas”⁴ campaign in 2005 to exploit its cultural reputation as an efficient, dependable, and business-oriented country.

However, one trend that has increased over the past decade in the realm of nation branding involves a key cultural element that people can experience and enjoy on the level of the senses: food. The use of food as a nation brand is one specific tool that a government can employ in its broader strategy of cultural diplomacy, an idea that public diplomacy scholar Nicholas Cull defines as “a country’s policy to facilitate the export of examples of its culture.”⁵ In this case, the exported cultural artifact would be a national dish, or more broadly, national cuisine.

Several countries—most notably, France, Italy, and Mexico—already enjoy the global reputations of robust and distinctive culinary cultures. Nonetheless, the idea of a specific campaign that constructs the image of a nation through its food is a relatively new phenomenon, especially for smaller countries with lesser-known national cuisines. According to Paul Rockower, this process, which is termed “culinary diplomacy” or “gastrodiploacy,” uses “culinary delights to appeal to the global public’s appetite and thus [help] raise a nation’s brand recognition.”⁶ Rockower, a gastronomist and a graduate of the Center on Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California, works as an international consultant helping nations to create effective culinary brands. For Rockower, “gastrodiploacy, simply put, is the act of winning hearts and minds⁷ through stomachs” (2010), a phrase that emphasizes the way in which food can function as a non-threatening way to gain favor among and make a connection with a foreign audience.⁸

² Simon Anholt, “Editor’s Forward to the First Issue,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 1, no. 1 (2007): 4–11.

³ “Australia Unlimited,” Australian Trade Commission, <http://www.brandaustralia.gov.au/>.

⁴ “Germany – Land of Ideas,” Land der Ideen, <http://www.land-der-ideen.de/en>.

⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, “Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (2006), 31–64.

⁶ Paul Rockower, “Why Not Feed Indonesia to the World?” *Jakarta Globe*, December 10, 2010, <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/commentary/why-not-feed-indonesia-to-the-world/411045>.

⁷ This phrase clearly echoes the rhetoric of the soft-power strategy used by the U.S. to gain the support of the Afghan population of the current war in Afghanistan. To be sure, the process of “winning hearts and minds” takes on a distinct significance in a wartime situation, such as the current context of Afghanistan, because the lives of both troops and civilians are at stake. Kathleen Rhem offers a description of this process in her article, “Civil Affairs: Winning Hearts and Minds in Afghanistan,” (<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=42605>).

Gastrodiplomacy in the 21st Century

Within the last decade, many traditional diplomatic efforts have increasingly been supplemented with and enhanced by cultural diplomacy, especially in the ambit of cuisine. The government of Thailand was one of the first to officially engage in gastrodiplomacy when, in 2002, it launched a project titled “Global Thai,” which aimed to greatly increase both the quantity of Thai restaurants abroad and the familiarity of the international community with Thai food. This campaign, “it is argued, will not only introduce deliciously spicy Thai food to thousands of new tummies and persuade more people to visit Thailand, but it could subtly help to deepen relations with other countries.”⁹ This dual purpose—the idea of pleasing the palate while at the same time improving political affairs—lies at the core of any effort in the realm of gastrodiplomacy.

Utilizing Thailand’s campaign as a model, several other Asian nations have followed suit and developed their own forms of culinary diplomacy that make use of their distinctive cuisines. South Korea, for example, attempts to carry out “*kimchi* diplomacy” by making the most of its chief ingredient of cabbage,¹⁰ while Taiwan’s “diplomacy by *dim sum*” is seen by some as an inconspicuous effort to differentiate itself from its much larger and more influential neighbor, China.¹¹ In addition, the Malaysian government’s initiative, “Malaysian Kitchen for the World,” hopes to showcase the diversity of the country by focusing on its unique Peranakan cuisine, a blending of Malay and Chinese flavors.¹² In the true spirit of culinary diplomacy, the campaign seeks to increase familiarity with Malaysia as it promotes the cuisine of the Malaysian nation. These examples all reveal small nations that are attempting to establish reputations for themselves by creating readily identifiable images, or rather “nation brands,” through the use of the cultural element of food.

The Culinary Nation and the Case of Peru

While the prevalence of gastrodiplomacy as a governmental tool is generally on the rise in Asia, the idea of promoting a national cuisine seems to be an underexplored avenue in other regions of the world, particularly in Latin America. Peru, however, represents one notable exception.¹³ Throughout the past decade, several organizations within Peru, including the Peruvian Society of Gastronomy (APEGA) and the government Ministries of Culture and of Foreign Relations, have begun a collaborative and concerted endeavor to elevate the global reputation of and familiarity with Peruvian cuisine. In other words, they hope to create Brand Peru through the practice of gastrodiplomacy.

Anholt states that when developing a nation brand, this national reputation “cannot be constructed; it can only be earned,” it is problematic to promote an idea that lacks the material quality to support it.¹⁴ In the context of culinary diplomacy, then, this implies that just as one cannot create a feast with rotten ingredients, a nation cannot invent a brand centered on cuisine without a solid gastronomic foundation. Lucky for the Peruvian government, there exists a rich culinary history that boasts intense flavors and diverse influences. The climate in Peru allows for both a diversity of crops and a variety of each crop, such as the presence of over 150 types of sweet potatoes.¹⁵ Additionally, the Inca and pre-Inca heritage merges with the varied cuisines, unfamiliar culinary practices, and exotic ingredients that are the result of centuries of immigration from various parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa. The combination of these factors serves as the perfect recipe for a distinctive and delectable fusion of taste and culture that manifests itself in the Peruvian cuisine of today.

UNESCO and the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

Although the overarching goal of APEGA and the Peruvian government seems to be to promote the nation through

⁸ Paul Rockower, “Korean Tacos and Kimchi Diplomacy,” University of Southern California Center of Public Diplomacy Blog, http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/index.php/newswire/cpdblog_detail/korean_tacos_and_kimchi_diplomacy/.

⁹ “Food as Ambassador: Thailand’s Gastro-diplomacy,” *The Economist*, February 21, 2002, <http://www.economist.com/node/999687>.

¹⁰ Julia Moskin, “Cultural Diplomacy With a Side of Kimchi,” *New York Times*, September 23, 2009, <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE0D8103FF930A1575AC0A96F9C8B632009>.

¹¹ Robert Booth, “Taiwan Launches ‘Gastrodiplomacy’ Drive,” *Guardian*, August 8, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/08/taiwan-launches-gasto-diplomacy-drive>.

¹² Paul Rockower, “Malaysia Jumps on Gastrodiplomacy Bandwagon,” *The Daily Beast*, March 29, 2011, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2011/03/29/malaysia-jumps-on-gastrodiplomacy-bandwagon.html>.

¹³ Mexico is without a doubt another exception (and possibly the quintessential one). Mexican cuisine is quite well-established around the world, evidenced by their inclusion in UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010 (“Traditional Mexican cuisine”). However, as a result of many factors I will not discuss here, Mexican cuisine remains a complex issue in terms of identity, due in large part to its diffusion around the world. For a detailed exploration of the connection between Mexican food, culinary practices in Mexico, and the formation of individual and collective identity, see Jeffrey Pilcher, *Que vivan los tamales: Food and the making of Mexican identity*.

¹⁴ Simon Anholt, *Places: Identity, Image, and Reputation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 6.

¹⁵ Kenneth Kiple, *A Moveable Feast: Ten millennia of food globalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 129.

gastrodiplomacy, one concrete step in this process involves the goal of having Peru's cuisine designated by UNESCO as part of the "intangible cultural heritage of humanity."¹⁶ UNESCO suggestions that aspects of a culture that receive this coveted title are "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces, associated therewith—that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage:" in short, these are elements that "provide [communities] with a sense of identity."¹⁷ The realization of this objective would signify that those outside of Peru have recognized the national cuisine not solely on its gastronomic merits but also for its historical and symbolic importance to the identity of the Peruvian nation.

"Cocina peruana para el Mundo"

After submitting the official proposal to UNESCO in March of this year, the government and APEGA created a web-based campaign to garner popular support and rally public participation: "*Cocina peruana para el mundo*."¹⁸ The homepage for this internet-based initiative includes various links for the interested citizen: a section of recent news developments that involve cuisine; links to pertinent webpages (including a Facebook group and YouTube videos); and a running total of people who support the culinary project.

In addition, this gastrodiplomacy project utilizes celebrities to endorse its merits and goals, and by doing so it implicitly depends on "star power" and name recognition to confer a certain level of legitimacy. The section titled "Testimonies," for example, includes comments by a Peruvian Nobel Prize-winning author, Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa; a former U.S. vice-president, Al Gore; an actress and supermodel, Eva Mendez; a world-famous chef/television personality, Anthony Bourdain; and various famous Peruvian chefs, including Gastón Acurio, Javier Wong, and Adolfo Perret.

When analyzed critically, the comments of some of these celebrities that are included on the website serve to characterize the project, "*Cocina peruana para el mundo*," as having a broader goal than simply the recognition of excellent cuisine; indeed, the rhetoric engenders a sense that the food can be considered a nationalistic representation of the nation's identity. For example, chef Perret states that "Peruvian cuisine is an expression of culture. It is full of roots, traditions, historical legacy, and, above all, full of identity. It is an authentic representation of our people."¹⁹ Chef Wong's frank opinion appears as a challenge: "whoever doesn't cooperate with this campaign...is simply unpatriotic."²⁰

"De Ollas y Sueños" ("Cooking Dreams")

Apart from the efforts of the "*Cocina peruana para el mundo*" to garner public support for the Intangible Cultural Heritage campaign, another significant component of the Peruvian proposal to UNESCO is found in the inclusion of the documentary film, *De ollas y sueños* (*Cooking Dreams*), as part of the presentation of Peruvian culture. Produced in 2009 by documentary director Ernesto Cabellos and Lima-based film and television production company Guarango, this film explores Peru's identity, traditions, and nationalism through the lens of Peruvian cuisine. In the film's synopsis, the producers state that "this documentary isn't just about food. This documentary is about integration, challenges, culture, poverty, and wealth."²¹

Just as was evident in the campaign "*Cocina peruana para el mundo*," in the documentary film, we also see the intention to explore the underlying associations among the ideas of food, nation, and identity. Through an attempt to present the entire range of regional cuisines and indigenous ingredients, Cabellos and his production team frame the entire film in terms of the following fundamental question: can an entire nation be represented in its cuisine? Indeed, this question emerges as the crucial, yet often unspoken, dilemma to be reconciled, both in the specific case of Peru and in the more general context of any project that deals with the promotion of an idea that claims to fairly represent all involved. This problem will be examined in detail in the following sections, but here it should be noted that the mere asking of the question—especially within the formal presentation submitted to UNESCO—signifies a step in the right direction in taking into account those populations that are often marginalized.

¹⁶ According to BBC Mundo, one main motivation for Peru's campaign can be found in its culinary rivalry with Mexico. As Mexican cuisine was given this designation in 2010, there appears to be an implicit (and sometimes explicit) rivalry between the two countries to be the gastronomic leader of Latin America. This competitive sentiment is summed up in the title of the article from BBC Mundo: "*¿Qué tiene la comida mexicana que no tenga la peruana?*"

¹⁷ *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, UNESCO, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>.

¹⁸ "Cucina peruana para el mundo," *Cucina Peruana para el mundo*, <http://www.cocinaperuanaparaelmundo.pe/>.

¹⁹ My translation. Original text in Spanish: "la Cocina Peruana es una expresión cultural. Está llena de raíces, tradiciones, legado histórico y, sobre todo, llena de identidad. Es el fiel reflejo de nuestro pueblo."

²⁰ My translation. Original text in Spanish: "quién no colabora con esta campaña... simplemente es un antipatriota."

²¹ Documentary Synopsis, "*De ollas y sueños*," www.guarango.com.

Gastón Acurio

Finally, the most prominent figure in Peruvian cuisine, Gastón Acurio, is deserving of attention. As a culinary diplomat and chef extraordinaire, Acurio often emerges as the face of the Peruvian initiative for UNESCO recognition of its cuisine. Through his presence in the aforementioned documentary, his appearance on the websites of the campaigns, and his attendance at world-renowned food festivals, he fills the role of gastronomic ambassador of the Peruvian people to the international community. He also was one of the first Peruvian chefs to convincingly present the cuisine to international stomachs by opening restaurants in various countries, including the United States, Chile, Mexico, and Spain.

Worthy of note, in the case of Acurio, are the ways in which he purposefully brings a political discourse into the realm of the culinary and, in turn, demonstrates that cuisine has political implications. The son of a Peruvian politician, he has frequently and openly denied aspirations that he has an ambition to run for office and has consequently distanced himself from politics. His 2006 speech at the opening of *Universidad del Pacífico* in Lima, however, is seen by some, including *De ollas y sueños* director Cabellos, as “the most inspiring political speech in the past decade.”²² In the speech, he discusses the potential consequences that a Peruvian national cuisine can have for the national consciousness of the country, in addition to possibilities for social change that exist within the movement of creating a national culinary brand.

It is no surprise, then, that the media refers to him as “the commander-in-chief of Peru’s gastronomic revolution” and as someone who manages “an *empire* of restaurant franchises.”²³ Acurio seems genuinely committed to addressing social problems in Peru through a variety of culinary solutions. For example, he hopes that the existence of Peruvian restaurants abroad will help to develop supply chains that will economically support small farmers in rural zones of Peru. The discussion surrounding Acurio raises a crucial question: does an individual—particularly a chef—have the capacity to unite the nation and create a national brand with which most citizens agree? This fundamentally important question does not have an obvious answer in theory, but rather it must be examined in practice within the culinary diplomacy movement in Peru. What is clear, however, as much in the figure of Acurio as in the examples of *De ollas y sueños* and “*Cocina peruana para el mundo*,” is the unavoidable connection between politics and cuisine in Peru.

Why Food? The Peruvian Context

With this backdrop of the specific components of Peru’s gastrodiploamacy project, we now turn to an analysis of the reasons behind the decision to focus this campaign on food. Why did the Peruvian government choose to utilize food as the central component of its national image and nation brand when it could have selected several other themes? For example, Peru boasts a vibrant indigenous cultural heritage centered on Incan and pre-Incan civilizations and Macchu Picchu, and two traditional Peruvian dances (the dances of *las Tijeras* and of *la Huaconada*) are already named by UNESCO as “intangible cultural heritage.” Would it not be less complicated to simply take advantage of and promote these traditions?

The fact is that Peru deliberately chose to base its nation brand on food, and one explanation for this lies buried in a statement by the filmmaker Cabellos. “It is in our cuisine where we rediscover and encounter our nationalism. It hasn’t been in football—Peru hasn’t participated in a World Cup in more than 25 years—or either in politics or music. It is the cuisine, our food.”²⁴ Here, Cabellos implies that there is something unusual, even exceptional, about Peruvian cuisine, but also more generally about food and its potential to serve as a vehicle for conveying emotion.

In addition, the nation brand expert Anholt comments that “more engagement, not simply more communication, with the rest of the world can enhance the profile of places, and higher visibility does tend to go together with stronger appeal.”²⁵ One way to foster engagement and therefore to perpetuate the nation brand can be found in the facet of the Peruvian campaign that focuses on restaurants, as they have the capacity to directly involve people with the cuisine on a sensory level. In addition to the fact that Acurio has established numerous restaurants in all parts of the globe, the Peruvian government has incorporated restaurant creation as a fundamental aspect of its culinary diplomacy project. Alejandro Riveros, the head of public diplomacy for the Peruvian Embassy in Washington, D.C., comments that “we want our food to be as well known as Thai is in this country... We want 5,000 —no, 10,000 [restaurants in the United States]. We want Peruvian restaurants everywhere.”²⁶

²² Ernesto Cabellos Damían, interview by New World Review, *New World Review: Journal of Latin American Food, Drink, and Travel*, January 8, 2010, <http://newworldreview.com/2010/01/interview-wde-ollas-y-suenos-director-ernesto-cabellos-damian/>.

²³ Eliza Barclay, “Chef Gaston Acurio carves Peruvian-flavored empire,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 2009, <http://www.latimes.com/features/la-fo-acurio21-2009jan21,0,2894957.story>.

²⁴ Ernesto Cabellos Damían, interview by New World Review, *New World Review: Journal of Latin American Food, Drink, and Travel*, January 8, 2010, <http://newworldreview.com/2010/01/interview-wde-ollas-y-suenos-director-ernesto-cabellos-damian/>.

²⁵ Anholt, *Places*, 7.

²⁶ Walter Nicholls, “High on Peru,” *Washington Post*, May 10, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/09/AR2006050900337.html>.

In more general terms, food serves an ideal way to achieve this engagement mentioned by Anholt, because every person in the world has some experience with food, at the very least as a form of sustenance. Because we experience food through our senses (touch and sight, but especially taste and smell), it possesses certain visceral, intimate, and emotional qualities, and as a result we *remember* the food we eat and the sensations we felt while eating it. The senses create a strong link between place and memory, and food serves as the material representation of this experience.

Why Food? Food, Identity, Nation: A Theoretical Approach

Moving away from the particular context of Peru and its culinary project, a broader analysis of the theoretical intersections among food, identity and nation can begin to offer a deeper understanding of the implications of nation branding through gastrodiploacy. As a way to nourish oneself and to acquire sufficient nutrients, food in its material and tangible manifestation is considered the most basic and fundamental component for the lives of all humans in the world. All must eat to survive, and in this way food “occupies an unrivaled centrality in all of our lives.”²⁷

However, as a consequence of this basic and quotidian character, the importance and the centrality of food frequently go unnoticed. There exists the tendency to take for granted the role of food and the significant influence it can have in the formation of identity, both individual and collective. In other words, “although [food] might not dominate our conscious,” it is important to realize that “it nevertheless serves to structure our lives.”²⁸ Therefore, the purpose of this section is to utilize existing literature in the areas of sociology and cultural studies to investigate the ways in which food and the gastronomic discourse influence identity, above all in the context of the nation.

Collective Identity from Below: Food as Banal Nationalism

Popular knowledge maintains that the process of fomenting nationalism implies magnificent and explicit demonstrations of the spirit of the nation. For example, events at the national scale that emphasize a common identity—such as an independence day celebration, military ceremonies that involve uniforms, or the inauguration of an important political figure—are associated with this traditional conception of nationalism. To be sure, these “occasional moments of emotional intensity, shared collectively throughout the entire country”²⁹ are indeed factors in perpetuating and intensifying the identity of the nation among its members.³⁰

However, it quickly becomes clear that the construction of the national sentiment cannot be as simple or as neat as this popular idea intends to show. Quite the contrary: many nuances and confusions begin to appear. Social psychologist Michael Billig, among others in the field, questions this predominant notion that says that expressions of nationalism have to be manifest and dramatic. In his research, Billig explores the idea that nationalism (re)produces itself daily at the most basic level, and with this foundation he develops his idea of “banal nationalism.” For him, “the concept of ‘banal nationalism’... attempts to call attention to the types of nationalism that pertain to the everyday and that become so familiar that they are frequently taken for granted.”^{31 32}

It is here in Billig’s discourse—the point at which he begins to highlight the importance of the banal in the idea of the nation—where food and cuisine begin to fit into the idea of the nation. Given that food occupies a “banal” place in daily life, it naturally follows that food constitutes one of the various elements that can foment banal nationalism. Catherine Palmer, in her article, “From Theory to Practice: Experiencing the Nation in Everyday Life,” affirms Billig’s ideas and, moreover, posits that one can apply them quite fittingly to food as a material reality.³³ Although she admits that the process of defining one’s identity is too complex to be limited to merely food and the act of eating, she maintains that these are indeed an example of “how a sense of nation-ness can be ‘flagged,’ not only within a particular community, but also to others from outside that community.”³⁴ In this sense, “food is as much a badge of identity as are the more obvious symbols of national belonging” such as flags and national anthems.³⁵

²⁷ David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 4.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ My translation. Original Spanish text: “momentos ocasionales de intensidad emocional, compartidos colectivamente en todo el país”

³⁰ Michael Billig and Rosemaría Núñez, “El nacionalismo banal y la reproducción de la identidad nacional,” *Revista mexicana de sociología* 60, no. 1 (1998): 37-57.

³¹ Ibid.

³² My translation. Original Spanish text: “el concepto de ‘nacionalismo banal’... propone llamar la atención sobre las formas del nacionalismo que se pueden encontrar más próximas y que resultan tan familiares que se suele darlas por hecho.”

³³ Catherine Palmer, “From Theory to Practice: Experiencing the Nation in Everyday Life,” *Journal of Material Culture* 3, no. 2 (1998), 175-99.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

When considering the relation between food and nation, one must understand two principal factors: first, that “the nation is a fluid cultural construct,” and second, that “food is one among many agencies which participate in its construction and the continuing process of its redefinition.”³⁶ This process occurs, as Billig and Palmer both emphasize, at the level of the “banal.”

A Success? On Whose Terms?

With this understanding of the deep and complex connections between food and the national identity, the Peruvian example of culinary diplomacy serves as the ideal context in which to explore potential implications of an attempt to reconcile food as banal and material and cuisine as a national brand. Although at times contradictory, these two manifestations of food are entwined to such an extent that one must analyze them as parts of one culinary discourse that constitutes identity. Richard Wilk emphasizes this same point:

“There is an important set of distinctions here between cuisine as an unself-conscious, nonreflective aspect, ‘habitus’ of food that is deeply embodied through many cultural and social practices, and cuisine as part of the national imagination, as a set of public, political, performative, symbolic discourses. But there is no evidence that these two aspects of food can ever be separated from each other or that either can be treated as more real or authentic.”³⁷

However, the ideas of culinary diplomacy and of creating a national brand based on food can call into question the validity of these constructions. What are the problematic aspects of these campaigns? Can they be addressed, mitigated, or even eliminated? In their essence, these issues revisit the question posed through the documentary *De ollas y sueños*: can an entire nation be represented in one cuisine?

In a nation-wide initiative that claims to represent every citizen, there are unavoidably individuals or populations that do not fit within or under the constructed labels. Therefore, homogenizing rhetoric such as, “as Peruvians, we are proud of our cuisine”^{38 39} and all discourse that speaks of a vague and unqualified “we” risks glossing over and excluding certain populations. To whom, then, does “we” refer, and who does it (unintentionally or intentionally) exclude?

When speaking of the *alta cocina*, or the high cuisine, that serves as the brand of Peru’s gastrodiploacy, one automatically must consider the state of affairs of those whose culinary practices are generally not considered as pertaining to this category. This might include, among others, the rural and *mestizo*⁴⁰ populations of Peru that for centuries have been utilizing almost unchanging ingredients and culinary practices. Do the Peruvian government and the representatives of “*Cocina peruana para el mundo*” address this discrepancy, and if so, how?

One almost ubiquitous element found in the literature is a reference to the importance of the indigenous ingredients, traditions, and heritage in the culinary nation brand. The documentary *De ollas y sueños* states that “the word *mestizo* was a pejorative word; today it is an asset”⁴¹ in the sense that the qualities of fusion and synthesis inherent in the cuisine serve as a faithful representation of the *mestizo* identities of the Peruvian population. By blending historical flavors and contemporary presentation, the cuisine of the campaign attempts—at least in rhetoric—to bridge the gap between *comida* and *cocina*, or between food and cuisine. In other words, it seeks to create a nation brand in which “banal” food and high cuisine become one and the same. The campaign is too recent to thoroughly evaluate the lasting implications of whether or not it actually achieves this in practice, and additionally (and perhaps most importantly) whether or not segments of the citizens feel that their identities have been ignored: only time will tell.

In economic terms, a crucial issue always centers on who benefits monetarily, and at whose expense. As was the case with the qualitative studies mentioned in the previous paragraph, there has been scant quantitative data up to this point regarding potential economic benefits earned by the Peruvian government as a direct result of the campaign. In general, economists find it particularly difficult to measure the successes or failures of the process of nation branding because one cannot easily differentiate between intervening variables and mitigating factors. For example, if tourism revenue in Peru increases throughout the next five years, researchers could speculate regarding a link with the government’s culinary diplomacy campaign. In the absence of surveys or other means of evaluation, however, any claim of direct correlation would

³⁶ Bob Ashley et al., *Food and Cultural Studies: Studies in Consumption and Markets* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 89.

³⁷ Richard Wilk, “Food and Nationalism: The Origins of ‘Belizean Food,’” in *Food Nations: selling taste in consumer societies*, edited by Warren James Belasco and Philip Scranton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 70.

³⁸ My Translation. Original Spanish text: “los peruanos miramos con orgullo nuestra cocina”

³⁹ www.cocinaperuanaparaelmundo.pe

⁴⁰ *Mestizo* is a word often used in the context of Latin America to refer to a person or a population of mixed heritage (specifically, Native American and European).

⁴¹ My translation. Original Spanish text: “la palabra mestizo era una palabra peyorativa; hoy en día es nuestro valor”

“Cocina peruana para el mundo” seems, then, to be a reality currently being realized and, at the same time, an ideal toward which Peru can strive. As one of the more recent countries to sign on to an official program of culinary diplomacy, “Brand Peru” has an uncertain—yet undoubtedly dynamic—future in the upcoming months and years. One thing is certain, though: food remains an elemental and profound way to experience the world and a fascinating lens through which to analyze the ideas of nation and identity.

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